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What Heaven is

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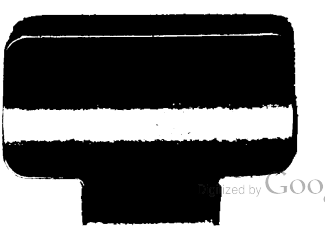

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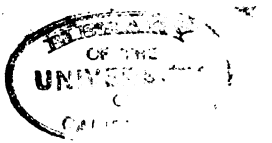

WHAT HEAVEN IS.

"Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest." — HEB. iv., 11.

IN one of our ablest Reviews, a discussion has been going on for some time on the soul and future life; and it is a sign of the large toleration of the times that some of the writers not only glory in expressing a belief that, apart from his body, man has no soul, and no life beyond the grave — an opinion, the open expression of which would, twenty years ago, have been received with outbursts of indignation; but have even arrived at the point of treating with compassionate disdain those who still cling to the traditional belief. Now I do not think it needful, brethren, in this nineteenth century after Christ, to argue with you that you have souls, and that your life is not as the life of the beasts that perish. To the end of time the human race will believe this, though from the dawn of History there have been a few philosophers who disputed it. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum.* These speculations have never

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shaken, will never shake, the fixed convictions of mankind. Those convictions might have been expressed from very early ages in the simple verse of the poet:

"Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal;
'Dust thou art, to dust returnest,'
Was not spoken of the soul."

We may freely concede that, of the separate existence of the immaterial soul, and our survival beyond "the intolerable indignities of dust to dust," we have no mathematical demonstration to offer. But this fact does not in the slightest degree trouble us, because neither is there any such proof of the existence of a God. It is perfectly easy for a man to say, if he will, "I do not believe in a God.' I do not care to offer up any worship, even of the silent sort, even at the altar of "the unknown and the unknowable." I do not even think it worth while to pray that wild prayer once uttered by a criminal upon the scaffold: "O God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul." A man may say all this, and plume himself on this melancholy abnegation of man's fairest hopes; on this deliberate suicide of the spiritual faculty; and if he considers such

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opinions to be a sign of intellectual emancipation, we can offer to him no proof that will necessarily convince him. When Vanini lay in prison on a charge of atheism, he touched with his foot a straw which lay on his dungeon-floor, and said, "that from that straw he could prove the existence of God. We can pluck the meanest flower of the hedgerow, and point to the exquisite perfection of its structure, the tender delicacy of its loveliness; we may pick up the tiniest shell out of myriads upon the shore, so delicate that a touch would crush it, and yet a miracle of rose and pearl, of lustrous iridescence and fairy arabesque, and ask the atheist if he feels seriously certain that these things are but the accidental outcome of self-evolving laws. We can take him under the canopy of night, and show him the stars of heaven, and ask him whether he really holds them to be nothing more than "shining illusions of the night, eternal images of deception in an imaginary heaven, golden lies in dark blue nothingness." Or we may bid him watch with us the flow of the vast stream of history, and see how the great laws of it are as mighty currents "that make for righteousness." Or we may appeal to the inner voices of his

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being, and ask whether they have indeed no message to tell him. But if he deny or reject such arguments as these; if he treat with arrogant scorn that evidence of the things unseen which has been enough in all ages for the millions of humanity — which was enough in past times for Dante and Shakespeare, and Milton and Newton — which was enough till yesterday for Brewster, and Whewell, and Herschel, and Faraday; if he demand a kind of proof which is impossible, and which God has withheld, seeing that it is a law that spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned, and that we walk by faith and not by sight; if, in short, a man will not see God because clouds and darkness are round about Him, although righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His seat, then we can do no more. He must believe or not believe — he must bear or must forbear, as seems him best. We cannot argue about colour to the blind. We cannot prove the glory of music to the deaf. If a man shuts his eyes hard, we cannot make him see the sun. "That the blush of morning is fair, and the quietude of grief is sacred, that the heroism of conscience is noble, who will undertake to *prove* to one who does not

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see it? So wisdom, beauty, holiness, are immeasurable things, appreciable by pure perception, but which no rule can gauge, no argument demonstrate." My brethren, if you know God, or rather are known of Him, you will need no proof that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and you will not be much troubled by the scepticism of philosophers. Oh, let us get near to God by faith and prayer, and we shall break with one of our fingers through the brain-spun meshes of these impotent negations. Prove to us that by the word "God" we ought only to mean "vortices of atoms," or "streams of tendency," and at the end of such triumphant demonstrations we shall but kneel down before Him who made us, and not we ourselves, and with bowed head, and sad yet kindling heart, shall pray, if possible, with yet deeper conviction, "Our Father which art in Heaven." And when we thus believe in Him whom we have not seen, all else follows. We believe that He did not befool with irresistible longings, that He did not deceive with imaginary hopes, the man whom He had made. We believe that the breath of life which came from Him shall not pass away. We believe that He sent His Son to

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die for us and to save us. We believe that because He lives we shall live also. We believe; we are content; we do not even ask for further proof. In this belief, which we believe that He inspireth, we shall console ourselves amid all the emptiness and sorrow of life; we shall advance, calm and happy, to the very grave and gate of death.

2. I speak to Christians; to Christians who hope not only to live, but to live in Heaven hereafter; and I want this morning to fix your contemplation upon that Heaven, and to ask what are our thoughts of it, and why. And I do this partly because one of the ablest and most eloquent of the writers to whom I have alluded has spoken with passionate scorn of what he supposes to be our anticipations of Heaven, and of what he is pleased to represent as the necessary result of such anticipations. He says that we are looking for a "vacuous eternity;" "a future of ceaseless psalmody," "an eternity of the tabour," "so gross, so sensual, so indolent, so selfish," that the belief in it "paralyses practical life, and throws it into discord." "A life of vanity in a vale of tears, followed by an infinity of celestial rapture," is, he says, "necessarily a life of infinitesimal im-

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portance," making men "dull to the moral responsibility which, in its awfulness, begins only at the grave," and "little influenced by the futurity which will judge them." "And why," he asks, "should this great end, staring at all of us along the vista of each human life, be forever a matter of dithyrambic hypotheses and evasive tropes?"

Now I shall offer you no "dithyrambic hypotheses," or "evasive tropes," but, eloquent as all this is, I am sure that the most thoughtful of you must have listened to it with amused bewilderment. It must have been just a little incongruous and unreal to you to hear the Christian's hope of heaven described as though it were some Mohammedan paradise,— as being not only gross, selfish, and sensual, but also as paralysing and immoral,— when you know what lives it has influenced, what deeds it has inspired. Were the hopes of St. Stephen, think you, dull and immoral, when, with face radiant as the face of an angel, he gazed into the opening heavens? Was it a dull selfishness which inspired the martyrs as they bathed their hands in the torturing flame, or which nerved the Christian maiden as she knelt awaiting with a smile the tiger's spring? Was it a paralysing superstition which fills with

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"tempestuous glory" the sufferings of the good; which breathed through the calm last words of Richard Hooker; which made Addison tell the young Earl of Warwick to see how a Christian could die; which inspired the eager "Lord, open to me, open to me," of the dying Lacordaire; or which has enabled so many thousands of Christians, in every age and every country, to become lovelier in spirit during each hour of life's waning lustre, showing ever "a sublimer faith, a brighter hope, a kinder sympathy, a gentler resignation?" Ah, no! my brethren, "the rattling tongue of saucy and audacious eloquence" will never persuade you of this; and you will only listen with a smile when you are assured that the hopes which uplifted such lives, and glorified such ends, were but the confusing fumes of a puerile illusion. We *know* not indeed; but we *believe*. We walk by faith, though we cannot walk by sight. But were the arguments of these philosophers ten thousand times more cogent than they are,

"What can we do, o'er whom the unbeholden
Hangs in a night wherewith we dare not cope?
What but look sunward, and with faces golden
Speak to each other softly of hope?"

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It will take many a ream of agonistic and nihilistic literature to rob us of the conviction with which we say: "I believe in God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; I believe in the communion of saints, in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

3. Well, then, my brethren, we believe in Heaven; but what is Heaven? Our friends die — men die by myriads; at every ticking of the clock some fifty souls have passed away; yet not a breath of sound shakes the curtain of impenetrable darkness which hangs between us and the unseen world. A fair child sighs away his innocent soul, and in a moment, perhaps,

> "He hath learnt the secret hid
> Under either pyramid;"—

but to his parents, in their agony, comes no faintest whisper from the intervital gloom. Not to one of all the unnumbered generations whose dust is blown upon the desert winds has it been permitted to breathe one syllable or letter of the dim and awful secret beyond the grave. And yet the faith of man has not been shaken, nor for all this deep, unbroken silence, has he ever ceased

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to believe that He who called us into being will bless, will save, will cherish the souls which He hath made. We feel sure He did not mean us merely "to be born weeping, to live complaining, and to die disappointed," and so cease to be, but that He has a new home for us in other worlds. It is the *fact* which we believe; the details are not revealed to us. And hence each race has fancied its own ideal of Heaven.

"Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutored mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears Him in the wind,
His soul proud science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk and milky way,
Yet simple nature to his hope has given
Behind the cloud-capt hills a humbler heaven.
. . . . . .
To be content 's his natural desire,
He asks no angel's wing, no seraph's fire,
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog shall bear him company."

The Greek had his Elysian plains, where the Eidôla — the shadowy images of the dead — moved in a world of shadows; and his Islands of the Blest, where Achilles and Tydides unlaced the helmets from their flowing hair. The Scandinavian dreamed of his green Paradise hereafter amid the waste. Few indeed have been

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the nations who have not imagined that there remains for holy souls beyond the grave some

> "Island valley of Avilion,
> Where falls not hail or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly."

And all Christians, that they may be enabled to give some form to that which cannot be uttered, have dwelt with rapture on the glowing symbols of the poet of the Apocalypse — the New Jerusalem descending out of Heaven from God, having the glory of God, and her light like unto a stone most precious, even unto a jasper stone; and the gates of pearl, and the foundations of precious stones, and the pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, and the Tree of Life, with its leaves for the healing of the nations. Symbols only, — yet exquisite symbols of the poet's vision, which dull philosophies may scorn, but in which a Dante and a Milton delighted; symbols which come back to us with the freshness and sweetness of childhood, as we sing the hymns, so dear to Christian worship, of "Jerusalem the golden," or "There is a land of pure delight." Yet even these symbolic passages do not thrill the heart so keenly as others, which

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speak with scarce a symbol, and simply tell of a life without life's agonies, and the vision of God undarkened by mists of sin. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads." And if we need *any* symbols to help us, they are symbols of transparent meaning: green meadows where men may breathe God's fresh air, and see His golden light; glorified cities, with none of the filth and repulsiveness of these, but where no foul step intrudes; white robes, pure emblems of stainless innocence; the crown and the palm-branch, and the throne of serene self-mastery over our spiritual enemies; and the golden harp and the endless song — which do but speak of abounding happiness, in that form of it which is, of all others, the most innocent, the most thrilling, the most intense.

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4. To say that there is anything "dull, gross, selfish, sensual" here, is surely an abuse of words. But if you cannot rest in these emblems, there is *yet* a more excellent way. If you still sigh:

"O for a nearer insight into heaven,
More knowledge of the glory and the joy
Which there unto the happy souls is given,
Their intercourse, their worship, their employ;
For it is past belief that Christ hath died
Only that we unending psalms may sing;
That all the gain Death's awful curtains hide
In this eternity of antheming"—

if you say this, do not fear — there are other conceptions of Heaven which do not deal in imagery at all. What may be the physical conditions of Heaven we cannot tell, and perhaps the very phrase may be meaningless of that place where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God. But so far as Heaven is a place at all, its fundamental conception is that it is a place where sin is not. "Without are dogs." No guilty step may pass the gates of pearl, no polluting presence fling shadows on the golden streets. They who live there are the angels, and just men made perfect, and the spirits of the saints in light. And if we

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ever get there, we shall be as they; for to be there is to see the face of God, and to see the face of God is to be changed into the same image from glory to glory. There life's stains shall have been purged away; and the gold shall be mixed with dross no longer; nor the fine gold dim. There is no slander there; no envy, no hatred; no malice; no lies. There is no murder there, nor wounds, nor war. The filth of drunkenness is not in that city of God. No bleared and blighted crowds, degraded out of the semblance of humanity, crawl like singed moths round the flaring houses of multiplied temptations. There are no hearts depraved, corrupted, eaten out by lust; no victims of man's brutal selfishness, no witnesses of his utter shame. Ah, my brethren, which of us all looking back does not sigh: "I am not all that I might have been; I might have been noble, and I have not been noble; I might have been kind, and I have not been kind; I might have been pure, and I have not been pure?" Would you not think it almost a heaven if, without giving you anything fresh at all, God would but give you back what once He gave? If He would but restore to you the sweet innocent childhood He

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once bestowed, that having learnt now that sin is anguish, and that good is best, you might not ravage the fair vineyard of your life, or lay waste its inner sanctities? Ah, no! perhaps not, for you feel that you might only fall again; only be a prodigal again; only be weak and base and vile again, only despair again of what you feel to be sweetest, and barter for the degraded present the future immortality. But, oh, to have been disenchanted utterly, forever, from the low aims of the world! oh, to have been set free forever from the yoke of habit and the power of temptation! oh, to desire only, and to do only what is good, without evil being ever present to us! oh, to do perfectly, what here we have but imperfectly attempted! oh, to *be*, what here we have only seemed to be or wished to be! oh, to be honest, true, noble, sincere, genuine, pure, holy to the heart's inmost core! Is not that Heaven? is it dull, gross, sensual, selfish, to sigh for that? Is it not a state rather than a place? is it not a temper rather than a habitation? is it not *to be something* rather than to *go somewhere?* Yes, this, this is heaven. What more we know not. In other stars, amid His countless worlds, for all we know God may have work for us to do. Who

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knows what radiant ministrations; what infinite activities; what never ending progress; what immeasurable happiness, what living ecstasies of unimaginable rapture, where all things are lovely, honourable, pure; where there is no moral ugliness; where repulsive squalor, and degraded art, and insane desire, and loathly vice, and pinching selfishness, shall be no more; where boyhood shall not so live as to make its own manhood miserable; where manhood shall not so live as to make old age dishonourable; where old age shall not so live as to make death ghastly. This, this is heaven! And why should we not believe that the God who is so good to us hath such good things in store for all who love Him? All the good and true, all the pure and noble, shall be there:

> "To Milton's trump
> The high groves of the renovated earth
> Unbosom their glad echoes; inly hushed,
> Adoring Newton his serener eye
> Raises to heaven."

And all on earth who have ever been high and sweet and worthy, out of every tribe, and kindred, and nation, and language, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands! Oh,

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if this be a dull, gross, selfish, sensual conception, give us a greater and better that we may live on it; for we can conceive none lovelier than this, and to us *this* is Heaven.

5. Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest. For, my brethren, if, as we Christians believe, Christ hath died to give us entrance into such a Heaven as this, we must believe the same Gospel which tells us, not obscurely, that it is not a reward but a continuity, not a change but a development. To *go there* you must *be thus*. It is shocking to hear men and women talk glibly of "going to Heaven," whose whole lives, and well-nigh every action of their lives,— whose daily words, whose daily deeds, whose very professions, — are disgracing and embittering earth. If we desire Heaven we must seek it here — if we love Heaven we must love it now. And thou — oh, mean, greedy, avaricious, money-loving soul, whose gaze, even in Heaven, would be on the trodden gold of its pavement; and thou, base usurer and defrauder, who, hasting to be rich, carest not how little thou art innocent, and whose path in life is wet with orphans' tears; what hast thou to do with Heaven? there are no cheatings, or swindlings, or hoardings there; and thou,

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slanderous whisperer, whose soul is venomous with hate and envy; and thou, drunkard, who livest only to drown thy senses in wallowing degradation; and thou, slave of thy lowest lusts, whose uncleanness adds unspeakably to the shames and miseries of earth; and thou, selfish seducer, not afraid

> "To pluck the rose
> From the fair forehead of a maiden shame,
> And set a blister there;"

and thou who hatest thy brother with all but murderous detestation; and thou, bad youth, whose soul is full of fatal ignorance and sensual conceit, and who art drawing iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope; and all ye, children of wickedness, not slaves only, but willing slaves of Satan, who go as the ox to the slaughter, and as a fool to the correction of the stocks; if *ye* talk of Heaven, what have ye to do with Heaven? Think you that greed, and malice, and intoxication, and debauchery find entrance there? Is there not a lie in your right hands? Think ye to enter Heaven thus in all your vileness, meanness, falsity? Think ye that the apples of Sodom and the clusters of Gomorrah can grow in the same soil with the Tree of

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Life? Oh, while you know what you are, and are what you are, and yet will not be other than what you are, you would not be happy if God placed you there to-morrow. Every pure look of it would be a burning reproach to you; every rapture of it a burden, every nobleness a shame. If you went there with heart yet unchanged, you would carry hell with you to Heaven, and would make Heaven itself a hell. It could only be Heaven at all by your absence so long as — oh, mark this — so long as you are what now you are. But, oh, you can be different; you can be converted; you can repent. Burdens to yourselves, curses to the world, you can yet become true sons of God; you, even you, may enter the gates of pearl, and cast no shadow on the golden streets. For does not God love you, even you? Did not He die for you, even you? Your souls are worthless to all but His infinite love, but *He*, in His divine pity, did not think them worthless; for their life He died. Oh, repent ere it be too late, and be what now you are not, and be all that God meant you to be! "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before God's eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well." Repent; and *then* look towards Heaven. Put

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away the love of money, and ask God to give you his true riches. Put away selfishness, and ask God to give you the Spirit of His holy love. Put away lying, and be sincere. Put away conceit, and in the ashes of your self-abasement, tie round you with knots the sackcloth of humility. Put away impurity, and ask God to give you a clean heart and put a right spirit within you. Ay, so shall you begin to know what Heaven is! so shall you begin to have a foretaste of its happiness, even amid the sorrows of earth. So shall there be in your own hearts, amid all darknesses, a circle of radiant peace. Oh, you shall need the aid of no symbols, for you will think of Heaven, not as of some meadow of asphodel beside the crystal waters, or golden city in the far-off blue, but as an extension, as a development, as an undisturbed continuance of righteousness, and peace, and joy in believing; you shall know that, whatever else it be or mean, Heaven means holiness; "Heaven means principle;" Heaven means to be one with God.

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IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?

"So we that are Thy people, and sheep of Thy pasture, will give Thee thanks forever; and will always be showing forth Thy praise, from generation to generation." — Ps. lxxix., 13.

AS the first day of this month was the grand festival of All Saints, so in past centuries the second of November was set apart in honour of "All Souls." The motives which led to its abolition were doubtless adequate at the time, but yet we may be allowed to regret its abandonment. Undoubtedly there was a certain grandeur, a certain catholicity, a certain triumphant faith, a certain indomitable hope in that ancient commemoration of the departed. It was the feast of *All* Souls. It is true that it was originally intended only for the faithful departed; for the souls in purgatory. But in the title of the day, at any rate, there was no exception made. On that day men might think, if they would, of all the souls, of all the innocent little ones that have passed away like a breath of vernal air since time began; of all the souls

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which the great, and the wise, and the aged, have sighed forth in pain and weariness after long and noble lives; of all the souls of the wild races of hunters and fishermen in the boundless prairies or the icy floes; of all the souls that have passed, worn and heavy-laden, from the roaring city streets; of all the souls of those whose life has ebbed away in the red tide of unnumbered battles, or whose bodies have been dropped into the troubled waves unknelled, uncoffined, and, save to their God, unknown; of all the souls, even of the guilty, and of the foolish, and of the miserable, and of those who have rushed by wild self-murder into their Maker's presence. All Souls' Day was a day of supplication for, of commemoration of, all these. For these too are souls that He created; into these too He breathed the breath of life; and all these lie in the hollow of His hand as the snows of the countless water lilies — whether white and immaculate, or torn and stained — lie all on the silver bosom of the lake. Yes, there is a grandeur and sublimity in the thoughts of all human souls, as one by one they have passed away and been taken to the mercy of the Merciful; and a day might well have been set apart to com-

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memorate, in all humble reverence, their awful immortality. Our finite imaginations may grow dizzy at the thought of these infinite multitudes, — these who at each ticking of the clock pass from the one thousand millions of the living; the tribes, the generations, the centuries, the millenniums, the æons of the dead; all of which are but the leaves — green or fallen — of the mighty Tree Existence, — the wave after wave of its illimitable tide. As we think of all these souls, we recall the imagination of the great poet of the *Inferno*, and seem to be gazing on a white, rushing, indistinguishable whirl of life, sweeping on and on and on, from horizon to horizon, in ever lengthening cycles and infinite processions, endless, multitudinous, innumerable, as the motes that people the sun's beam. To us, inevitably, in this infinitude, all individuality is lost; human numeration reels at it. But it is not so with Him to whom is known the number of the stars of the heaven, and the sands of the sea, and by

> "Every leaf in every nook,
> Every wave in every brook,"

who are heard as they sing forth their unending pæan all day long. And knowing this, we are

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not appalled at the thought of these vast multitudes, whose bodies are now the dust of the solid earth, even though so many millions of them have passed away in sin and sorrow, because we can say with the Holy Psalmist of Israel: "O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before Thee, according to the greatness of Thy power, save Thou those that are appointed to die; so we, that are Thy people and sheep of Thy pasture, shall give Thee thanks forever, and shall always be shewing forth Thy praise from generation to generation."

2. But if we cannot say this at all, if we have lost all faith in God, how does life appear to us then? There are, alas! many who have lost their faith in God. My brethren, it is not for us to judge them or to blame them; nay, we most heartily pity them; not, believe me, with any supercilious sense of superiority; not with any Pharisaic taint of pride, but for their own sakes, and in sincere and humble brotherhood of sympathy, even if they reject or despise such sympathy. Knowing how terrible, how irreparable, would be the loss of such faith to *us*, we regret their loss; and we pray that they, no less than we, may be folded at last in the arms of

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God's infinite mercy, and led into the radiance of His eternal light. But seeing that the faith of their childhood and of their fathers has suffered shipwreck; seeing that they think, or think that they think, that there is no God, and that we die as the beasts of the field, we cannot wonder that they ask themselves whether life be at all worth the living. Nay, we are glad that they should discuss such questions; because the deeper their bark sinks, the more sure we are that they must at last reach that bed on which the ocean rests, — that God, whose offspring we all are, and in whom, whether we deny Him or have faith in Him, we all live and move, and have our being.

3. But since this question is now being deliberately discussed, "Is life worth living?" ought we not, as Christians, to face it quite fearlessly and quite faithfully? It is not desirable surely that we should separate the pulpit from the thoughts of the week-day world, or avoid the questions which those who reject and those who scorn religion discuss among themselves. I do not believe, my brethren, in the faith which can only be sheltered by an effeminate clericalism, or a professional conventionality. For myself,

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I desire that the creed of a Christian clergyman should be a manly creed, not afraid to be assaulted—not anxious to be spoken of with bated breath. I wish that it should be no mere exotic, which must be kept under glass lest any wind of heaven should visit it too roughly; but that it should be rather like the green blade of the corn, which every rain-storm may drench, and on which the snow may lie, and over which the scorching heat may burn and the chill wind blow, but which, because God's sunlight falls on it, and it has a principle of life within, in spite of, nay, because of, every freezing or blighting influence, grows up from the tender blade to the green ear, and from the green ear to the rich and ripened corn.

4. Is then life worth living? Life, I mean, regarded by itself; life on this earth; life apart from God; your life, my life, human life in general, considered under its purely earthly aspects and relationships? Let us glance at this question,—it *must* be inadequately; it may be mistakenly; it may be quite superficially, but yet (which God grant us!) with the one merit of a humble endeavour after perfect honesty.

5. And, in answering the question, let us, my brethren, in no wise exaggerate. Let no personal

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circumstances, let no melancholy temperament, let no pressure of immediate, and it may be passing, trials bias our verdict. Let us, so far as may be, look at life steadily and whole. It is not all darkness; it has its crimson dawns, its rosy sunsets. It is not all clouds; it has its silver embroideries, its radiant glimpses of heaven's blue. It is not all winter; it has its summer days on which "it is a luxury to breathe the breath of life."

> "Life hath its May, and all is joyous then;
> The woods are vocal, and the winds breathe music,
> The very breeze has mirth in it."

Ask the happy little child with its round cheeks, and bright eyes, and flaxen curls, and pure, sweet face, and the tender, tender love and care that enfold, and encircle, and treasure it, and smooth its path the whole day long; ask the happy boy, tingling with life to the finger-tips, making the fields ring with his glad voice on summer holidays, happy in unselfish friendships, in generous impulses, in strong health, in the freedom from all care, in the confidence of all hopes, when "the boy's will is the wind's will, and the thoughts of youth are long;" ask happy

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lovers, when they know the joy of being all in all to each other, and to their glad gaze

> "A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,
> A deeper sapphire melts into the sea!"

Ask soldiers in the hour of victory; ask great thinkers when some immortal truth bursts upon them; ask the happy band who gather in the yet unbroken circle round the Christmas hearths: or, take less thrilling moments, and ask fathers and mothers when cares do not press, and the little ones are gone to bed, and they sit together by the fireside through the quiet winter eve; at such times, perhaps, all these will be inclined to tell you that life *is* worth the living. And though such hours come not to all, and come not alike to the good and evil, to the wise and foolish, yet we all do have peaceful periods of our lives; quiet intervals at least between storm and storm; *interspaces* of sunlight between the breadths of gloom; until over every one of us the night at last sweeps down.

6. Yes, my brethren, let us acknowledge, — let us cherish, — let us be grateful for, — let us, as far as we may without selfishness, multiply these natural pleasures, these simple, or innocent, or

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holy joys. Let us admit, too, that God is very, very good to us, and that the worst evils of our lives are often in anticipation only, and of our own making, not of God's. The Christian is no *pessimist* to encourage in himself a view of life needlessly discouraging; he is no *ascetic*, thinking that God cares for pain or sorrow for pain and sorrow's sake; he is no *cynic*, who walks of choice in avenues of cypress. And yet if I ask you honestly whether these golden threads of happiness are many enough, or strong enough, to weave either the warp or woof of life, I think I know what your answer must be. Let us grant that childhood at least — keen as are its little trials — is yet rarely otherwise than happy, and that its tears are dried as swiftly as the dew upon the rose. Let us grant, too, that boyhood, though St. Augustine truly says that the boy's sufferings are as great while they last as those of a man, is generally happy; happier since the day when Arnold raised the whole tone of our public schools, happier since the day when Shelley abhorred the petty tyrannies of Eton, and the life of a shrinking, sensitive boy whose name was William Cowper was darkened here at Westminster. And yet not always happy, I think;

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and sometimes the source, through life, of the saddest memories and consequences; and forgetful, too often, of the "inevitable congruity between seed and fruit." But when swiftly, imperceptibly, boyhood and youth are over, and manhood with all its cares is upon us; when the golden gates close forever behind us, and we step forth into the thorny wilderness; when the splendid vision fades into the light of common day; when the brilliant ideals and innocent enthusiasms of early years have been smirched, and vulgarised, and dimmed; when not one single ray of illusion or of enchantment rests, were it but for one instant, over the bleak hills and barren wilderness of life — worn men and weary women — ye who must work, and ye who must weep — how is it with us then?

7. My brethren, I will not take any one of the great *crimes* of life, such as every now and then they are revealed to us, when the lurid gaze of publicity is cast upon the interior of some suburban villa or small farm. Clergymen and physicians know well that these are more common than are ever made known. I cannot doubt that among these hundreds gathered here in this abbey there must be one or other on

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whose conscience there lies the burden of some deadly undiscovered sin. On all of us sin strives to creep with serpent rustlings, silent, gradual, stealthy; or to bound from ambush, sudden, irresistible, with tiger springs; and there must be some here who have been stricken with that poison or crushed beneath that wild beast's force. But I will take no such cases as that of the clever, handsome youth sinking step by step into dissipation, into forgery, into shame unspeakable, and the felon's end; or as that of one who had lived his life honourably before men, tempted by fatal money into crooked ways, and pleading, with tremulous voice, against a sentence which to him has the agony of death. I will not even take the too common case of the man who wakes suddenly to the horrible truth that he is a drunkard, or under the fatal spell of some craving appetite. Who shall say "I am safe" even from such falls? Yet I will not take these great crimes of life; nor yet will I take its great *tragedies*. Who has not known cases in which some man has been suddenly beaten down to earth, bruised, bleeding, under the shock of some wholly unexpected, some quite intolerable, catastrophe? Who has not seen families, bright and prosper-

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ous, the whole happiness of whose hearth has been shattered, in one moment, as by the crash of doom? Who shall say "I and mine are safe from these?" Yet I will not take these cases. No, but I will take the common, common every-day cases of life; life's daily fever; life's necessary trials. My brethren, our sorrows are quite different sorrows; but which of all of us — be he rich or poor, be he noble or insignificant, be he senator or shop-boy, — is exempt from them? Take *pain:* is there one of us who has not known the throbbing head, the aching nerve, the sleepless night? Take *health:* are there none here who rarely know what perfect health is? Take *reputation:* have we not been in anguish when cruel and false things — or in yet deeper anguish when cruel things and true things have been said of us? Take *home:* is there no household whose graves have been scattered far and wide? No father who has seen the dust sprinkled over the golden head of his dear little child? No mother whose heart has not ceased to ache since Death plucked her "wee, white rose?" No husband from whom the light of his eyes has been taken at a stroke? No lonely man, whose circle has ever narrowed and narrowed, and whose path in

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life has been marked by the gravestones of his early friends? And, short of death, are there no parents whose sons have wrung their hearts by folly and ingratitude; who have, in some far land, a prodigal who will come back no more? And, of all the hundreds who are listening to the voice of a weak fellow sinner like themselves, are there not some — perhaps many — whose hopes do but seem to dwindle and dwindle as life goes on; on whom morning never dawns, but it dawns upon heavy cares, as they think with a sigh of the dreary routine before them; of the insufficient means which hamper them; of the debts that hang like a millstone about their necks; of the chill discouragement of helpless and burdened poverty? And are there not some who look forward, almost with agony to their day of death, and think how, mayhap, they must leave their dear ones — loved wife, and little sons, and little daughters — unprotected and unprovided for, to the cold pity and grudging charity of a frosty world? How many might almost sing with the poet as he sat in deep dejection on the shore:

> "Alas! I have nor hope, nor health,
> Nor peace within, nor calm around;

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Nor that content, surpassing wealth,
The sage in contemplation found;
. . . . . .
Others there are whom these surround,
Smiling they live, and call life pleasure;
To me that cup hath been dealt in far other measure."

For, alas, my brethren, I have not yet told anything like the worst! A man may bear up against sorrow. He may think it no great matter whether he be happy or unhappy. If life be not sweet to him, but bitter, he may yet think it to be borne. If he be a true Christian he may say: "I have received the cross, I have received it at Thy hands; I will bear it, and bear it till death, as Thou hast laid it upon me." But when to all this *sin* is added; when "calamity meets an accusing conscience;" when a man has the sense of wasted opportunities, the shame of forsaken ideals, the sting of evil memories, and the plague of polluted and polluting thoughts; when, even at the best, he feels that, in this or that act or phase of his life he was unloving, ignoble, uncandid, not what he ought to have been, not what God would have had him be, ah! to the noble heart is there not sorrow, is there not anguish here? Apart from deeper and darker

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errors, is there not the sense we all must have of duties unfulfilled; of holy things neglected; "of days wasted forever; of affections in ourselves or others trifled with; of light within turned to darkness?" Ah! when, with our souls, the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously, yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously, and we have been the worst treacherous dealers to ourselves, does life seem worth having then? Should we not say:

> "Alas for man if this were all,
> And nought beyond, O earth"?

8. So that, when I look at life I say, "Lead, lead me on, my hopes!"

But if you ask me whether life without God in the world, and with no hope beyond, is worth having, I answer, "*No!*" nor is it I only who say it, but all the best, and greatest, and wisest of mankind. Ask the kings and queens, ask the poets and scholars, ask the warriors and statesmen, whose dust lies buried here! Was Elizabeth happy? was Chatham happy? was Spenser happy? was even Newton happy? Ah! no. Over the volumes of human history is written: "Vanity of vanities!" and the volumes of biog-

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raphy are full of lamentation and moaning and woe. Scripture itself is a record of human sorrow. I am well aware that they who would rob us of all our hopes; who would take away our Lord out of the sepulchre, so that we know not where they have laid Him; who would change our God into a struggle of careless forces or a complexity of impersonal laws; who would turn all creation for us into a mask with no living face behind it, or a hollow eye-socket in which no eye of love or mercy ever shone — I know that they tell us that all this makes no difference, and offer us, for God, I know not what goddess of humanity; and I know not what "posthumous activity," for a life beyond the grave. My brethren, if they want to take our fine gold from us, we want no dross or tinfoil in its place; nor for the diamonds of heaven will we take glass and paste. Some of us, at least, will cling to duty, though duty be robbed of all her sanctions; and to virtue, though virtue lose every shadow of her reward. We do not need these sham gods and mock eternities; and as for the world, if religion fail to save it from wickedness, God only knows what atheism will do. It will not be content with lacquer religions and pinchbeck faiths. It

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will go its way, picking and stealing, chambering and wantoning, lying and slandering, till the pit swallow it; and the sole logical result of scepticism is that which is openly proclaimed by the coryphæus of materialism, the deification of suicide, the end of evil and futile misery by the extinction and annihilation of the human race.

9. But, oh! my brethren, if you will listen to me for a moment more, how, when it is touched by one ray out of God's eternity, does this blank materialism — this grotto of icicles in the Valley of the Shadow of Death — melt into mud and nothingness! How does this glaring metal colossus, with its golden head of intellectualism, tumble into impotency when the rock of faith smites it on its feet of miry clay! If there be no hope, and no God, and no things unseen, if there be no atonement for the intolerable wrong, if praying nations uplift their hands in vain, if only a hollow echo followed Christ's prayer of agony upon the cross, then, as far as I can see, life is a revolting nullity and a hideous dream which no poetic make-believes can redeem from its intolerable weariness. But let but one whisper of God's voice thrill the deafened sense; let but one gleam of His countenance flash on the blinded

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eyes; let His hand hold forth to us but one green leaf from the Tree of Life; and how is all changed! Ah, how can we then thank God for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life! How can we cry then with bursts of exultation: "Thou, O God, art our Father, our Saviour, our merciful God; and we that are Thy people and the sheep of Thy pasture will give Thee thanks forever!" If our thoughts have come to us this afternoon "clothed in a cloud," let them depart "encircled with a rainbow." That rainbow may seem at times to be but a watery image, yet it arches the spray of the cataract, it shines upon the menace of the storm. Sorrows? yes but to us they are but mercies in disguise. Sins? ah, yes! but they are forgiven and cast away. Is life worth living? Ask the atheist, and if he tells you his real thought it must be that of the Greek poet, "That it were best never to have been born, and next best to depart as soon as possible;" or that of the English poet:

"Count o'er the joys thine hours have seen,
Count o'er thy days from anguish free;
And know whatever thou hast been,
'Tis something better not to be."

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But ask the Christian "Is life worth living?" and he will answer: "Ay! indeed, life is infinitely worth living, and death is even infinitely more worth dying; for to live is Christ and to die is gain. To live is to have faith in God, and to die is to be with Him forevermore."

"Death is the veil which they who live call life;
We sleep, and it is lifted."

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"HELL"—WHAT IT IS NOT.

"For this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead."
—1 PET. iv., 6.

WHEN I spoke from this place last Sunday on the question, "Is life worth living?" when I preached three Sundays ago on Heaven, some of you may possibly have thought: This is all very well for true Christians; all very well if in this world there were only saints; but the saints are few in number, and this world is full of sinners. See what a spectacle it presents! Look at the coarseness and foulness exhibited at every turn in the streets around us. Walk at night in squalid purlieus, not a stone's throw from this abbey, where glaring gin-palaces are busy, and amid the reek of alcohol you may hear snatches of foul oaths and odious songs; where women sit shuddering in wretched garrets, to think of the brutal hands which will strike, at the brutal feet that will kick them, when the

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drunkard staggers home; where the young lads of the schools over which we spend so many millions of money are being daily ruined and depraved by being allured into low haunts of gambling and degradation. Or walk in the thronged haunts of *commerce*, where myriads are utterly and recklessly absorbed in that hasting to be rich which shall not be innocent; or judge from the vile phases of the stage and the opera, that vice in higher places is none the less dangerous from being gilded and perfumed; note all these facts — you may say — and then tell us, not in an ideal world, but in this world, which looks too often as though it were a world without souls — in this world where there is so much of cruel selfishness, of degraded purpose, of serpentine malice, of insane desire, — tell us, in such a world as this, how does all that you have said apply? Alas! the vast majority of men and women whom we see are not saints, but sinners, and contented with their sins, and living in their sins; and covetousness, and drunkenness, and lust, and lying, and dishonesty, and hatred, claim each their multitude of votaries and of victims. Have you then any right to paint the world in rose-colour? Is it not mere

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insincerity, mere clericalism, to shut your eyes to patent facts? We, who, by our very presence here, show that we do not belong to classes openly and flagrantly irreligious, are yet, many of us, great sinners. Even when there is no dread crime upon our consciences, many of us are far from God; our hearts are stained through and through by evil passions; we are tied and bound with the chain of our sins. You bid us repent; but how many do repent? You the clergy, who stand often by the bedsides of the dying; you who know how men live, and know that in nine cases out of ten they die as they have lived, — if your theory of life is to be complete — if it is not to be a mere hollow professional sham — what do you think about the future? Tell us about the lost!

2. My brethren, you have the fullest right to ask these questions, and it is our bounden duty to answer them; and I for one — in all deep humility — yet, now and always asking God for fearless courage and perfect honesty — will try to give you such answer as I can. If it be but the fragment of an answer, it is because I believe it to be God's will that no other should be possible; but at least I shall strive to speak such

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truth as is given me to see, and to answer no man according to his idols. Those who take loose conjectures for established certainties; those who care more for authority than for reason and conscience; those who pretend to dignify with the name of Scriptural argument the "ever-widening spirals" of dim and attenuated inference out of "the narrow aperture of single texts;" those who talk with the self-complacency of an ignorance that takes itself for knowledge, as though they alone had been admitted into what — with unconscious heresy and unintentional irreverence — they call "the council-chambers of the Trinity," — *they* may be ready with glaring and abhorrent pictures of fire and brimstone; and those of them who are not tender, and not true, may feel the consolatory glow of personal security, as they dilate upon the awfulness and the finality of the sufferings of the damned. But those whose faith must have a broader basis than the halting reconciliation of ambiguous and opposing texts; they who grieve at the dark shadows flung by human theologians athwart God's light; they who believe that reason, and conscience, and experience, as well as Scripture, are books of God, which must

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have a direct voice in these great decisions, they will not be so ready to snatch God's thunder into their own wretched and feeble hands; they will lay their mouths in the dust, rather than make sad the hearts which God hath not made sad; they will take into account the grand principles which dominate through Scripture no less than its isolated expressions; and undeterred by the base and feeble notion that virtue would be impossible without the horrors of an endless hell, they will declare their *hope* and *trust* — if it be not permitted us to go so far in this matter as belief and confidence — that, even after death, through the infinite mercy of the loving Father, many of the dead shall be alive again and the lost be found.

3. I cannot pretend, my brethren, to exhaust in one sermon a question on which whole volumes have been written. There are some of the young in this congregation; many of you, I regret to see, are standing — I am reluctant ever to trespass too long on your attention, and cannot therefore profess to-day to meet and to silence all objections. But one thing I can do — which is to tell you plainly, what, after years of thought on this subject, I believe; and what I know to

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be the belief of multitudes, and of yearly increasing multitudes, of the wisest and most learned both of the laity and of the clergy in our English Church.

4. What the popular notion of hell is, you, my brethren, are all aware. Many of us were scared with it, horrified with it, perhaps almost maddened by it in our childhood. It is that, the moment a human being dies — at whatever age, under whatever disadvantages — his fate is sealed hopelessly and forever; and that if he die in unrepented sin, that fate is a never ending agony, amid physical tortures the most frightful that can be imagined; so that, when we think of the future of the human race, we must conceive of "a vast and burning prison, in which the lost souls of millions and millions writhe and shriek forever, tormented in a flame that never will be quenched." You have only to read the manuals, you have only to study the pictures published, though but rarely, by members of our own Church, and more frequently by some Roman Catholics on the one hand, and some sections of Nonconformists on the other, to see that such has been and is the *common* belief of Christendom. You know how Dante, in his vision, comes

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to a dark wall of rock, and sees — blacker in the blackness — the chasm of hell's colossal portal, and, over it, in characters of gloom, the awful line:

"All hope abandon, ye who enter here;"

and how, passing through it, they reach a place where, in the mere vestibule, and even before they reach the region of more frightful agonies, sighs and wailings trembled through the starless void, and the sound of voices deep and hoarse, and hands smitten wildly together, whirling always through the stained and murky air. But it is even more awful to find such things in our own great writers, who had no belief, like Dante, in that "willing agony," of purgatory, into which poor souls might gladly plunge, assured that at last, redeemed and purified, they too should pass into their paradisal rest. Read how the great Milton, after telling us of "the supereminence of beatific vision," plunges at once into the frightful sentence that they who have been wicked in high places, "after a shameful end in this life (which God grant them), shall be thrown downe eternally into the deepest and darkest gulfe of hell, where under the despightfull controule, the trample and spurn of all the other damned, that, in the an-

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guish of their torture, shall have no other ease than to exercise a raving and bestiall tyranny over them as their slaves and negroes, they shall remaine in that plight forever,— the basest, the lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot and downe-trodden vassals of perdition." Or read Bishop Jeremy Taylor's sermon on Christ's Advent to Judgment, and see how his imagination revels in the "Tartarean drench" which he pours over his lurid page, when he tells us how "God's heavy hand shall press the *sanies* and the intolerableness, the obliquity, and the unreasonableness, the amazement and the disorder, the smart and the sorrow, the guilt and the punishment, out from all our sins, and pour them into one chalice, and mingle them with an infinite wrath, and make the wicked drink off all the vengeance, and force it down their unwilling throats, with the violence of devils and accursed spirits." Or, once more, read in Henry Smith — the silver-tongued Platonist of Cambridge — how, when iniquity hath played her part, "all the Furies of Hell leap upon the man's heart, like a stage.— Thought calleth to Fear; Fear whistleth to Horror; Horror beckoneth to Despair, and saith, 'Come and help me torment this sinner.' . . . Irons are laid

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upon his body, like a prisoner. All his lights are put out at once." Can we wonder that, receiving and believing such doctrines, the poet Habington writes:

"Fix me on some bleake precipice,
Where I ten thousand years may stand,
Made now a statua of ice,
Then by the summer scorch'd and tann'd!
Place me alone in some fraile boate
'Mid the horrours of an angry sea;
Where I, while time shall move, may floate,
Despairing either land or day:
Or, under earth my youth confine
To th' night and silence of a cell,
Where scorpions may my limbs entwine,
O God! so thou forgive me hell!"

or that Shakespeare, after lines of marvellous power, should exclaim:

"'T is too horrible;
The weariest and most loathed earthly life
Which age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death!"

5. Well, my brethren, happily the thoughts and hearts of men are often far gentler and nobler than the formulæ of their creeds; and custom and tradition prevent even the greatest

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from facing the full meaning and consequences of the words they use.

When Milton talks thus of hell he is but giving form and colour to his burning hatred of irresistible tyranny and triumphant wrong; when Jeremy Taylor and other great divines and poets wrote thus of it, they gave us but the ebullient flashes from the glowing caldron of a kindled imagination. What they say is but, as it were, the poetry of indignation. It is only when these topics fall into vulgar handling,— it is only when they reek like acrid fumes from the poisoned crucible of mean and loveless conceptions,— that we see them in all their intolerable ghastliness. Many true and loving Christians have, I know, held these views, and have mourned with aching hearts over what seemed to them the fatal necessity for believing them. But others, less good and less pure, have *exulted* in them, and I know nothing more calculated to make the whole soul revolt with loathing from every doctrine of religion than the evil complacency with which some cheerfully accept the belief that they are living and moving in the midst of millions doomed irreversibly to everlasting perdition. St. Augustine dared to say that infants dying unbaptised would cer-

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tainly be damned, though only with a *levissima damnatio*. Even St. Thomas of Aquinum lent his saintly name to what I can only call the abominable fancy that the bliss of the saved may be all the more keen because they are permitted to gaze on the punishment of the wicked. Boston, in his "*Fourfold State*," talks of God holding up the wicked in hell-fire with the one hand, and tormenting them with the other. Now even a saint of God sins when he speaks thus, and is setting up in the place of God the Idol of the Tribe or of the Den, and no language can be stern enough to reprobate the manner in which some, who are not saints of God at all, who are not even the elder brother of the Prodigal, whose religion has resolved itself into a mere feeble heresy-hunting, have turned God's gospel of plenteous redemption into an anathema of all but universal perdition. Which of us has not heard sermons, or read books to the effect that if every leaf of the forest trees, and every grain of the ocean sands stood for billions of years, and all these billions were exhausted, you would still be no nearer even to the beginning of eternity than at the first; and that (pardon me for reproducing what I abhor) if you could conceive an everlasting tooth-

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ache, or an endless cautery, or the incessant scream of a sufferer beneath the knife, that would give you but a faint conception of the agony of hell; and yet in the same breath that the majority of mankind are doomed to hell by an absolute predestination? Which of us has not heard teaching which implied, or did not even shrink from stating this? And dare any one of you regard such teaching as other than blasphemy against the merciful God? If you are not unaffected when "the destitute perish of hunger, or the dying agonise in pain," is there any human being, worthy the dignity of a human being, whose soul does not revolt and sicken at the notion of "a world all worm and flame"? One who is not of us wrote yesterday to the *Times*, how, standing in that Parisian prison where the Girondists held their last supper; whence Danton passed to his scaffold; where Robespierre, the night before his execution, lay weltering in his blood; where Marie Antoinette poured out her soul in the last hour of her life; he saw an exquisite crucifix of ivory in the cell where it had been left since that queen, and wife, and mother had turned to it all night in her last agony; and he adds that, in such a scene as that, all logic, doctrine, politics, sever-

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ity of judgment are hushed, and "Human nature asserts its preëminence, and claims the whole field of thought for pity. In presence of that agonising figure on the cross, the whole soul revolts against judicial terrorism in whatsoever name, by whatsoever tyrant committed." He is speaking, of course, of earthly tyrants; but, my brethren, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" and shall the image of the crucified Redeemer inspire, in one who rejects His divinity, the noble pity which seems as if it were alien to many of His sons? I can sympathise with the living poet when he cries:

"Were it not thus, O King of my salvation,
Many would curse to Thee, and I for one,
Fling Thee Thy bliss, and snatch at Thy damnation,
Scorn and abhor the shining of the sun;
Ring with a reckless shivering of laughter,
Wroth at the woe which Thou hast seen so long,
Question if any recompense hereafter
Waits to atone the intolerable wrong."

If St. Paul, again and again, flings from him, with a "God forbid!" the conclusions of an apparently irresistible logic, we surely, who have very little logic of any kind against us in this matter, but only questionable exegesis, supported

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in too many instances by spiritual selfishness and impenetrable prejudice, do in the high name of the outraged conscience of humanity, — nay, in the far higher names of the God who loves, of the Saviour who died for, of the Spirit who enlightens us, — hurl from us representations so cruel, of a doctrine so horrible, with every nerve and fibre of our intellectual, moral, and spiritual life. Ignorance may make a fetish of such a doctrine if it will; Pharisaism may inscribe it upon its phylacteries; hatred may write it, instead of "Holiness to the Lord," on the sacerdotal *petalon* in which it degrades and simulates the name of love; but here, in this vast mausoleum of the glorious dead, here amid the silent memorials of the sons of fame and the fathers who begat us, of whom many, though not saints, were yet noble, though erring men, — and of whom (though they, and we alike, shall suffer, both here and hereafter, the penalty of unrepentant sin) we yet cannot and will not think as damned to unutterable tortures by irreversible decrees, — I repudiate these crude and glaring travesties of the awful and holy will of God; I arraign them as ignorantly merciless; I impeach them as a falsehood against Christ's

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universal and absolute redemption; I denounce them as a blasphemy against God's exceeding and eternal love! And more acceptable, I am very sure, than the rigidest and most uncompromising self-styled orthodoxy of all the Pharisees who have ever judged their brethren since time began — more acceptable by far to Him, the friend of publicans and sinners, who, on His cross, prayed for His murderers, and who died that we might live — more acceptable, I say, by far, than the delight which amid a deluge of ruin hugs itself upon the plank which it has seized — would be the noble and trembling pity — so fearfully unlike the language of divines and schoolmen, — which made St. Paul ready to be anathema from Christ for the sake of his brethren; which made Moses cry to his God at Sinai: "Oh, this people have sinned; and now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin —; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written."

6. But I would ask you to believe, my brethren, that I speak now no longer with natural passion, but with most accurate theological precision, when I say that, though texts may be quoted which give *prima facie* plausibility to such

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modes of teaching, yet, to say nothing of the fact that the light and love which God Himself has kindled in us recoil from them, those texts are, in the first place, alien to the broad unifying principles of Scripture; that they are founded on interpretations which have appeared to many wise men to be demonstrably groundless; and that for every one so quoted, two can be adduced whose *prima facie* and literal interpretation tells on the other side. There is an old, sensible, admitted rule, "*Theologia symbolica non est demonstrativa*"—in other words, that phrases which belong to metaphor, to imagery, to poetry, to emotion, are not to be formulated into necessary dogma, or crystallised into rigid creed. Tested by this rule, nine-tenths of the phrases on which these views are built fall utterly to the ground. But even were this otherwise, yet, once more, in the name of Christian light and Christian liberty; once more in the name of Christ's promised Spirit; once more in the name of the broadened dawn, and the daystar which has arisen in our hearts, I protest at once and finally against this ignorant tyranny of isolated texts which has ever been the curse of Christian truth, the glory of narrow intellects, and the cause of the worst

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errors of the worst days of the corrupted Church. Tyranny has engraved texts upon her sword; Oppression has carved texts upon her fetters; Cruelty has tied texts around her fagots; Ignorance has set knowledge at defiance with texts woven on her flag. Gin-drinking has been defended out of Timothy, and slavery has made a stronghold out of Philemon. The devil, as we all know, can quote texts for his purpose. They were quoted by the Pharisees, not once or twice only, against our Lord Himself, and when St. Paul fought the great battle of Christian freedom against the curse of Law, he was anathematised with a whole Pentateuch of opposing texts. But we, my brethren, are in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Our guide is the Scriptures of God in their broad outlines; the Revelation of God in its glorious unity; the books of God in their eternal simplicity, read by the illumination of that Spirit of Christ which dwelleth in us, except we be reprobates. Our guide is not, and never shall be, what the Scriptures call "the letter that killeth;" the tyrannous realism of ambiguous metaphors, the asserted infallibility of isolated words. But if this must be made simply and solely a matter of texts — if, except as a dead

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anachronism, we mean nothing when we say, "I believe in the Holy Ghost!" — if we prefer our sleepy shibboleths and dead traditions to the living promise, "I will dwell in them and walk in them" — then by all means let this question be decided by texts alone. I am quite content that texts should decide it. Only, *first*, you must go to the inspired original, not to the erroneous translation; and, *secondly*, you must take words, and interpret words in their proper and historical significance, not in that sense which makes them connote to you a thousand notions which did not originally belong to them; and, *thirdly*, you must not explain away, or read between the lines of the texts which make against the traditional view, while you refuse all limitation of those on the misinterpretation or undue extension of which that view is founded. Now I ask you, my brethren, where would be these popular teachings about hell — the kind of teachings which I have quoted to you and described — if we calmly and deliberately, by substituting the true translations, erased from our English Bibles, as being inadequate or erroneous, or disputed renderings, the three words, "damnation," "hell," and "everlasting"? Yet I say, unhesitatingly, — I say,

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claiming the fullest right to speak on this point, — I say, with the calmest and most unflinching sense of responsibility,— I say, standing here in the sight of God and of my Saviour, and it may be of the angels and spirits of the dead — that not one of those three expressions ought to stand any longer in our English Bibles, and that, being — in our present acceptation of them — in the notion (that is) which all uneducated persons attach to them — simply *mistranslations*, they most unquestionably will not stand unexplained in the revised version of the Bible if the revisers have understood their duty. The verb "to damn" in the Greek Testament is neither more nor less than the verb "to condemn," and the words translated "damnation" are simply the words which, in the vast majority of instances, the same translators have translated, and rightly translated, by "judgment" and "condemnation." The word *αἰώνιος*, sometimes translated, "everlasting," is simply the word which, in its first sense, means *agelong* or *æonian;* and which is in the Bible itself applied to things which have utterly and long since passed away; and is in its second sense something "spiritual" — something above and beyond time, — as when the knowl-

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edge of God is said to be eternal life. So that when, with your futile billions, you foist into this world αἰώνιος the fiction of endless time, you do but give the lie to the mighty oath of that great angel, who set one foot upon the sea, and one upon the land, and with hand uplifted to Heaven sware by Him who liveth forever and ever that "Time shall be no more." And finally in the Gospels and Epistles the word rendered "hell" is in one place the Greek "Tartarus," borrowed as a name for the prison of evil spirits, not after, but *until*, the resurrection; in five places "Hades," which simply means the world beyond the grave; and in twelve places "Gehenna," which means primarily the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, in which, after it had been polluted by Moloch-worship, corpses were flung and fires were lit; and is used, secondarily, as a metaphor, not of fruitless and hopeless, but — for all at any rate but a small and desperate minority — of that purifying and corrective punishment which, as all of us alike believe, does await impenitents in both here and beyond the grave.

But, be it solemnly observed, the Jews *to* whom and in whose metaphorical sense the word

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was used by our blessed Lord, never did, either then, or at any period, normally attach to the word "Gehenna" that meaning of endless torment which we attach to "hell." To them, and in their style of speech, — and therefore on the lips of our blessed Saviour, who addressed it to them, and spake in terms which they would understand, — it meant *not* a material and everlasting fire, but an intermediate, a remedial, a metaphorical, a terminable retribution.

7. Thus, then, finding nothing in Scripture or anywhere to prove that the fate of every man is, at death, irrevocably determined, I shake off the hideous incubus of atrocious conceptions — I mean those conceptions of unimaginable horror and physical excruciation endlessly prolonged — attached by popular ignorance and false theology to the doctrine of future retribution. But neither can I dogmatise on the other side. I see nothing to prove the distinctive belief attached to the word "purgatory." I cannot accept the spreading doctrine of Conditional Immortality; I cannot preach the certainty of Universalism. That last doctrine — the belief that

> "Good shall fall
> At last, far off, at last to all" —

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does indeed derive much support from many passages of Scripture; it — or a view more or less analogous to it — was held by Origen, the greatest and noblest, by Gregory of Nyssa, the most fearless, by Clemens of Alexandria, the most learned, by Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the most eloquent, by Justin Martyr, one of the earliest of the fathers; it was spoken of in some places with half approval, or with a rejection which even when absolute was sympathetic and respectful, by theologians like St. Irenæus, St. Athanasius, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, even St. Augustine himself; in modern times, among many others, it has been held by great and most orthodox theologians like Bengal and Tholuck, and by saints of God like Erskine of Linlathen and Bishop Ewing of Argyll. And further, whatever may have been the motives which influenced them, the Reformers struck out of the prayer-book the Forty-second Article, which declared that "All men shall not be saved." On such a question as this I care not for individual authority, but this much at least is proved by the many differing theories of wise and holy men — that God has given us no clear and decisive revelation on the final condition of those who have died

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in sin. It is revealed to us that "God is love;" and that "Him to know is life eternal;" and that it is not His will that any should perish; and that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive;" but how long, even after death, man may continue to resist His will; how long he may continue in that spiritual death which is alienation from God; that is one of the secret things which God hath not revealed. But this much, at any rate — that the fate of man is not finally and irreversibly sealed at death, and you yourselves, unwittingly perhaps, but none the less certainly, admit, and declare and confess, every time you repeat, in the Apostles' Creed, that Christ descended into hell. For the sole passage which proves that article of the Creed is the passage in St. Peter, which tells us that "He went and preached to the Spirits in prison, which sometimes were disobedient." St. Peter in my text tells you in so many words that "the Gospel was preached to them that were dead," and if, as the Church in every age has held, the fate of *those* dead sinners was not irrevocably fixed by death, then it must be clear and obvious to the meanest understanding that neither of necessity is ours.

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There then is the sole answer which I can give to your question, "What about the lost?" My belief is fixed upon "that living God" who we are told is "the Saviour of all men." My answer is with Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, that "we are lost here as much as there, and that Christ came to seek and save the lost;" and my hope is that the vast majority, at any rate, of the lost, may at length be *found*. If any hardened sinner, shamefully loving his sin, and despising the long-suffering of his Saviour, *trifle* with that doctrine, it is at his own just and awful peril. But if, on the other hand, there be some among you — as are there not? — souls sinful indeed, yet not hard in sin; souls that fail indeed, yet even, amid their failing, long, and pray, and love, and agonise, and strive to creep ever nearer to the light; then I say, have faith in God. There is hope for you; hope for you, even if death overtake you before the final victory is won; hope for the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven; hope for the mourners, for they shall be comforted, though you too may have to be purified in that Gehenna of æonian fire beyond the grave. Yes, my brethren, "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the

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fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him; "but say also, as Christ's own Apostles said, that there shall be a "a restitution of *all* things," that God willeth not that *any* should perish; that Christ both died, and rose, and revived that He might be Lord both of the dead and the living; that as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive; and that the day shall come when "*all* things shall be subdued unto Him, that God may be *all in all*"—*πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν—omnia in omnibus—all things in all men.*

THE END.

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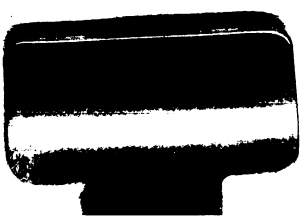

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